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POLITICS

Birch Group Invited Here for Founding

By BILL WILDHACK

Why did the founders of the John Birch Society happen to hold their organization meeting in Indianapolis?

During all the furor over the ultraconservative organization, that question has never been answered.

"It's very simple," says Marguerite Dice, 3650 Washington Blvd. "I invited them."

Miss Dice says she was attending a luncheon at the Propylaeum and engaged in a conversation with a woman sitting next to her about political and economic matters.

The woman, who has since died, told Miss Dice she should read some of the writings of Robert H. W. Welch Jr., now head of the Birch organization and then a sales manager for a candy company.

The result was that Miss Dice corresponded with Welch and in one of his letters he said he planned to organize a group of men to fight Communism. She invited him to call the organization meeting at her home, since Indianapolis is centrally located. After a series of discussions, the Birch Society was founded here December 9, 1958.

"I didn't even attend the meeting," Miss Dice says. "It was originally a men's organization."

She adds that no Indianapolis man was in the founding group, despite rumors to the contrary, and she makes it clear she is proud of her association with the society.

Another person with more than usual interest in the society is County Assessor David D. Finney, a boyhood friend in Georgia of the late John Birch. Birch was an Army captain who was killed in China under somewhat clouded circumstances by Chinese Communist troops August 25, 1945, just 11 days after the end of World War II.

When it was reported Welch had once written that former President Eisenhower, his brother, Dr. Milton Eisenhower, the late Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother, Allen Dulles, head of the Central Intelligence Agency, were members of the Communist underground, Finney wrote a letter to Birch's mother, Mrs. George S. Birch.

In his youth, Finney attended a Sunday school class taught by Mrs. Birch in Little Park Memorial Baptist Church in suburban Macon, Ga. Members of their families are still close friends. Finney said he was upset about news stories concerning the society and was fearful Mrs. Birch's son's name was being used to promote an extremist group.

Mrs. Birch replied, defending the society as "a truly great conservative organization dedicated to an educational program" and describing Welch as "a great statesman, a true leader for constitutional government and freedom in U.S.A."

She said the Birch family had been informed by the War Department in 1945 that her son was killed by a stray bullet on the Lunghai Railroad in China. But she peeked at a clipboard carried by a Macon federal employee who visited their home and saw that Birch was listed as killed by Chinese Communists. She said this version was later confirmed by one of her son's Army buddies.

Her letter included some suggested reading of books by anti-Communists and she sent under separate cover some literature to Finney. The mailing included the following documents:

"The Life of John Birch" by Welch.

A House Committee on Un-American Activities pamphlet containing the testimony of Edward Hunter, author and former correspondent, about

An analysis of the 17th national convention of the U.S. Communist Party by J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

A reprint from the Congressional Record of a report of the American Bar Association's special committee on Communist tactics, strategy and objectives. The pamphlet bears the rubric stamp of the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation, an ultraconservative controversial Catholic organization.

A flysheet put out by "The Voice of Freedom" from Macon, Ga., attempting to show that some aims of the Communist Party and the National Council of Churches are the same.

Despite this, Finney believes "it is unfortunate that the late John Birch should be the center of a controversy which may do honor to his memory."

"In our country we have extremists of the right as well as of the left," he adds, "and we are ultimately to lose our freedom to Fascism or to Communism. It doesn't particularly matter which direction we go."

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